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The Triumph of Decadence

by

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The

Triumph

of

Decadence

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Dim now and soil'd
Like the soil'd tissues of white
violets
Left, freshly gathered, on their
native bank.

-- Arnold, Sohrab and Rustum.

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Preface

In the following chapters I have attempted to give an impartial account for the inevitable disintegration of a great empire. My purpose will be to bring to light these causes other than to bluntly charge the guilt upon the Eastern Orthodox Church. I shall briefly compass the visible causes or symptoms of moral decay which had been the only creative force in Russia for at least three centuries.

The victim-circumstance of August the 12th 1904-- birth of the Tsarevich -- ushered the grand finally by given impetus to functionaries known as faith-healers who neither represented the State Church nor any of its officials but who were only representatives of orgiastic religious sects. Among one of these "holy fathers" was one called Rasputin meaning in Russian, the debauch; he became the state-power due to his able-administered consolations for the Tsar and the Tsaritsa in their hour of trial when the Tsarevich became very ill with the scourge of haemophilia. It is with this man that the true Church is wrongly and unjustifiably represented and in consequence condemned. One can authentically and emphatically shoulder the hastening of the 1917 revolution to this charlatan. Rasputin became the corpse that breeds infection and the infection became, in the Russian sense, prior to 1917, the revolution for

communistic Russia.

The Church, on the one hand, having being deprived of its authority, struggled with all the force of its nobler instincts to resist Rasputinism while the court, on the other, became wholly possessed by an intense, unreasoning yearning for the healing and consoling powers of that man of the lustful sect known as the Khlysty.

The aims of this thesis will be justification by proof.

I wish to express my sincere indebtedness to the students of the Pacific School of Religion who patiently discussed certain questions with me relating to problems of the church and the community; finally I wish to express my outmost gratitude to Dr. George T. Tolson and to Mr. James Philmore Collins who from time to time enriched me with questions and problems which had to be met with and solved within the sphere of this thesis.

Nicias P. Reckas

Introduction

Russia from infancy to adolescence -- a span of nearly two-thousand years -- possessed the misfortune to remain in the clutches of primitive thinking: and her progress proportioned her existing mode of thought. The rope of circumstance became braided by strands composed of Roman Legions, Renaissance of Europe, Barbarous Tartars, Greek Orthodox Missionaries, and lastly by geography itself.[1] These were Russia's effective processes, or more explicit, the clay properties and moulding agents; thus the evil had been inherent within uncalculable destiny. Finally by acts on the part of her feeble rulers she became drained of responsibility and morality and like dead leaves in the mercy of autumnal, windy blasts she was cast and floated down a new stream of thought and into a new experimental state.

A glamorous society, beautiful edifices, vast paved highways, unique governmental administration -- these were the visible symptoms of a higher civilization dramatized by the Roman Empire. The Latin Octopus spread its tentacles to Spain, France, England, Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine, Arabia, Africa,

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[1] J. Salwyn Schapiro, Modern and Contemporary European History, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1923) p. 500. Hereafter cited as Schapiro, Modern and Contemporary European History.

and other by-places -- but not towards Muscovy. A paved street, a temple, a bath, are still visible in these far-flung geographical locations. Civilization followed the Roman Legions. Russia unfortunately does not bear any vestiges of latinization. Her primitiveness flourished unrestrained.

In the fifteenth century an enthusiastic and vigorous activity along literary and artistic lines struck the blackened, ignorant past of Europe. Immediately the enlightened transition travelled swiftly to every part of the continent. Russia, again, by circumstantial fate, missed the opportunity to become one of the partakers of this luminous conversion.

Two centuries previous to the illuminating experience of Europe, Russia became a captive to a sudden invasion of semi-barbarous Tartarous hordes who devastated and kept the country back for at least three centuries. Immediately the inhabitants of Muscovy retreated into a brutish, savage, unprogressive state who neither cared for the blessings of a higher civilization nor for the social benevolence of the Renaissance. In due time the enormous significance played by these invading Mongols upon the stage of Russian History came to light. Their dress, manners and customs -- Oriental in nature -- had a lasting effect upon the conquerred people. Desolation and wretchedness followed; the need for a fascinating and exciting form of a religion be-

came acute.[2]

In times of stress and trouble all peoples, from the highest civilized to the lowest primitive, turn to religion for consolation. Russia under the Mongol yoke, proved no exception, accepted immediately the spiritual message of the Greek Missionaries. According to tradition, however, Russia embraced Christianity about 866 A. D., when two of her princess invaded Constantinople and brought back the new religion.[3] The new religion was neglected in the succeeding period. So in the oppressive times of the 15th century Muscovy extends to the Greek Apostles a welcome hand for their glad tidings. The puzzling question is the negligence shown in spreading Hellenistic learning by these men of the new faith.[4] Did they knowingly forget the higher culture of Hellas? Surely these men must have been versed in the Greek letters, Philosophy, and Science. The new religion arrived clothed only in the mystical and miracle garments of the East[5] -- two factors which became easily cultivated by the exaggerated stillness of the vast steppes.

Even nature reflected her contempt for the higher

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2 Walter F. Adeney, The Greek and Eastern Churches, (New York, 1918) pp. 371-384. Hereafter cited as Adeney, The Greek and Eastern Churches.

3 Ibid., p. 357

civilized welfare of Russia. The pathless seas of the steppes isolated Muscovy from the outside world. This natural geographical barrier of isolation coupled with the other mentioned causes kept Russia behind the progressive enlightment of Europe until the Twentieth Century.

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4 Schapiro, Modern and Contemporary European History. p. 500

5 The new Orthodox Faith entered Russia on the wings of a miracle. The Patriarch Photias upon seeing the two pirate Russian Princess arrive in the Bosporus raised a storm in the channel by casting the Virgin's garments upon the waters; the miracle resulted in the conversion of the two strangers. Immediately a victory hymn was composed and sung and is still sung to celebrate this triumphant victory for the Eastern Orthodox Church. It is really nothing more than a Missionary Hymn. I repeat the "Hymn of Victory":

Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατήγῳ τὰ νικητήρια, ὡς λυτρωθέντες τῶν δεινῶν, εὐχαριστήρια ἀναγραφομεν οἱ δοῦλοι σου Θεοτόκε, ἀλλ' ὡς ἔχουσα τὸ κράτος ἀπροσμάχητον, ἐκ παντοίων ἡμᾶς κινδύνων ἐλευθέρωσον ἵνα κράζωμεν σοι χαῖρε νύμφη ἀνύμφευτε, Δόξα, καὶ νῦν.

Faith, jubilation, hope, are the three prevalent characteristics of a primitive religion.[6] They are also common to Christianity. Striving, seeking, the soul abundantly overfloods itself with joy. There comes a tremble of silent sighing followed by jubilant inward singing. Such is the fervour of the Eastern Orthodox Church -- the foundation is concentrated upon the glory of the risen Christ. Thus, the peasant found consolation in the exalted rites of the new religion. There came about, in time, an exaggerated thirst for this exaltation -- a thirst which reached savagery at periods of stress. To satisfy the higher emotions, the primitive peasant perfected a system of cults which as the years rolled by increased in membership and finally one of them replaced the State Church of the Romonovs.

Within the next few chapters it will be my purpose to first, bring to light contributions made by the Greek Orthodox Church under adverse conditions towards the cultivation of a culture in Russia. Second, I shall delve into the mysteries of the different sectarian groups; and third, to give an account of the man who played the leading role in the religious drama of decadence.

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6 Nicholas Arseniew, Mysticism and the Eastern Church, (London, 1926) pp. 31-32. Hereafter cited as Arseniew, Mysticism and the Eastern Church.

Chapter One

I have been struck by the strange eventualities on the history-stage of Russia. If certain factors mentioned in my introduction had come into this vast region, would conditions have become better? I mean a higher civilization of course. I have said that the Greek Missionaries were negligent in bringing the Hellenizing culture within these new boundaries; however, no one can deny that on the wings of Orthodox mysticism a contribution was not made in the direction of culture. Would the Greek Orthodox Church have continued to lighten the dark past of Russia? These are the problems that I shall deal with in this Chapter.

I am prone and willing to question the inherent capabilities of the Russian mind to progress outside of certain channels. They themselves have frequently admitted the lack of capacity for progress. About 1850 a powerful and an original thinker, Tchadaiev by name, wrote of Peter the Great: "A great man threw us the cloak of civilization. We picked up the cloak; but we did not touch the civilization. Isolated in the world, we have given it nothing and taken nothing from it. We have not added one idea to the treasure of human ideals; we have not contributed in the slightest degree to the advancement of human

reason. . . . In our blood there is a morbid element which makes us proof against progress in any form."[1] With this voluntary admission it becomes extremely difficult for a non-Russian to see how Russia could have stepped in tune with Europe to the great song of the Renaissance.

Within the social enclosures of Russia's classes one finds differences and strangely enough, similarities. The instinct takes the form of vagrancy in the lower classes. This group wanders at will unable to settle anywhere. Writers as Maxin Gorky and Destoevski vividly and picturesquely describe the realistic conditions. In this same class "cynical habits of idleness, dissoluteness and theft are associated with a passion for individualism, an insatiable thirst for novelty, an exquisite feeling for nature and music, and an exalted sense of imagination and melancholy."[2] And "in the name of Christ" they unceasingly knock from monastery to monastery and impose upon the gracious hospitality of the monks for a piece of bread.

The upper classes bear a unique characteristic which coincides with actions as that of the lower classes. Weary

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[1] Maurice Paleologue, An Ambassador's Memoirs (Last French Ambassador to the Russian Court). English Translation (New York, 1925). vol. ii, p. 114. quoted. Hereafter cited as Paleologue's Memoirs.

[2] Ibid., p. 102

yawning gestures; bewilderment, topor and indolence; impulses od starts, darts and dashes to nowhere; extraordinary tiring facilities; an appetite for something new; a perpetual yearning and craving for sensational amusement; excessive extravagance for freakish and showy pride in apparel; perpetual undirected and purposeless visits and actions; religious mania; gloomy presentiments accompanied by morbid imaginings-- these are the manifold manifestations of the mental listleness which characterizes the higher society.[3]

Such symptoms among Russian society made possible the rise of fantastical, weird, and mystical sects and consequently the replacement of the Church.

Obviously, the Church, possessed with its primitive liturgies, found many fertile fields within the conglomerated nature of the Russians. Music-- the expression of deep religious feelings in musical language "are successively transports of prayer, sighs of despair, appeals for mercy, cries of distress, screams of fear, the anguished voice of repentance, the fervour

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[3]Paleologue's Memoirs. pp. 121-122; 27; 107; 94; 102; 104; passim.

of regret, the grief of self-abasement, flickers of hope, outpourings of love, transport of holy ecstasy, the splendours of glory and bliss"[4]. It was this magnetic fluid coursing through the veins of these people that gave reason for the existence and the survival of the Greek Orthodox Church. This same primitive music brought in by the Church gave the world Rimsky-Korsakov, Tschaikowsky, Borodin, and others with their unique style in, songs, operas, ballets, symphonies, orchestral and piano selections bearing the imprint of the land and the race. The national mind and soul -- depths of conscience and emotions arose to stages of classics by the commanding finger of the Byzantine Chants.

Doubtless, the Church, if left alone would have made further contributions towards the civilizing welfare of Russia. The curtailment, however, was ushered by Peter the Great who abolished the patriarchal throne of Moscow and replaced it with a bastard institution called the Holy Synod. His object was to weaken and make the Church his tool. In this he was successful. He even crippled the educational facilities of the monasteries by refusing monks to have neither ink nor pens in their cells. Inevitable stagnation followed. The Church lost its reputation by being strangled in the clutches of the new bureaucratic

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4 Paleologue's Memoirs. p. 321.

monster.[5] The priests and clergy became a closed caste without prestige or education, and out of touch with the great currents of the century. Meanwhile, the classes mystically inclined, sought satisfaction in the aberrations of the sects. Nicholas Romonov completed the ill-fated job by a greater blunder. He replaced the Holy Synod (the last ramments of the original Church) by one of the sects which had no affiliation with the true Church. The anihilation of the empire followed. "Before long", remarked Paleologue prior to the revolution, "the official Church will have nothing but its formalism, its rites, sumptuous ceremonies and matchless anthems; it will be a body without a soul."

I have tried in this brief chapter to show some of the elevating qualities or influences within the Russian Church which greatly effected her people when not hampered by the ambitions of her rulers. It has been said that nothing uplifting was offered by the Holy Institution. My answer is, how could she in the face of adverse circumstances? In the next chapter we shall have occasion to see different sects replace the views, yes, even the Church itself.

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5 Adeney, The Greek and Eastern Churches. pp. 420-433.

Chapter Two

There are innumerable religious sects in Russia. Some are distinguished from others by practices of gross excesses and sensuality. Most of these are detached from the established Church. Lack of moral discipline, the hunger for mystery, a taste of the indifferent, the extreme and the absolute -- these are the tones we hear ringing through the sects. Their aim is to directly communicate with God. And to attain the direct communication they resort to all the indulgences of the flesh.

Certain scholars claim that the movements (sects) "did not spring from any new spiritual awakening. . . . but purely in protest against new phases and rubric directions, and these were not innovations on sacred originals, but corruptions and changed usages. . . . "[1] Upon examination, however, the nature of these sects comes to view in the light of their characteristics. Exaggerated exaltation of the spirit, mutilation of the flesh, fanaticism, ecstasy and hysteria, asceticism and lust -- the established Church refused these principles: thus the protest followed finally, by the schism; the results, different types of sects according to the degree of mania possessed by each. I will give certain details about

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[1] Adeney, The Greek and Eastern Churches. p. 442.

two of these.

The two most amazing sects are the Khlysty and the Skoptsy. In the former, there are two sacraments or essentials to salvation. First, the flesh must be mortified and second, a reception must be offered to the Holy Spirit.[2] In this latter ceremony one author is of the opinion that the ritual is connected with barbaric, canibalistic tendencies and practices.[3] This may not be the truth. The early Christians were also accused of such rituals which did not exist.

Let us picture in chronological order the strange mystical rites of the Khlysty. The Miracle takes place in an ordinary, insignificant, peasant house. Upon crossing the threshold, but before entering, the faithful leave their heavy coats and overshoes outside the doorsteps. The inside of the hut is composed of one long white-washed room with rough benches on either side along the wall. In the middle a table with bread loaves and a jug of water upon it is set with two chairs. The two chairs are for the two leaders, a man portraying Christ and an unmarried woman, portraying His mother.

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[2] Frederick C. Conybeare, Russian Dissenters, (Cambridge, 1921) pp. 339-361. Hereafter cited as Conybeare, Russian Dissenters.

[3] Adeney, The Greek and Eastern Churches. pp. 441-458

The sixth evening of each week many peasants -- men and women -- silently and swiftly steal into the sanctuary of the room. Both sexes are clad in a white flowing raiment and each carrys a white handkerchief to be waved in imitation of angelic wings while performing the dance. When the setting sun has taken a pale reddish tint and is about to vanish below the horizon the windows of the hut are covered with thick curtains. The members now sit on the benches; women on the left and men on the right. They soon rise and in couples approach the presiding pair in the center of the floor, where under stress of prostration the token of godship is received.

Soon, long-drawn-out litanical hymns, psalms and folk-songs fill the air, expressing the desire of the Khlysty for the advent of the Kingdom of Heaven. The singing gradually becomes more voluminous and rapturous. This signifys the "people of God" have been changed to Angelic hosts and are thus purified for the appearance of the Saviour in their midst. They are now pure in spirit and in heart. Their earthly "coverings" must be exchanged for spiritual ones. So in consequence the peasants strip off their clothes and shoes replacing the former garments by a loose-hung white shirt.

The room is lit by twelve candles and as the singing reaches higher passionate and lustful cries one and then an-

other and finally all the peasants gleefully dance around the source of light like moths around a flame. Both men and women form pairs and continue their dance keeping time to the music. This mystical dance personifys the twelve desciples around Jesus. Soon, however, a different skipping step comes into play by which a moving, dancing cross is formed. At the same time the hands holding the white handkerchiefs, are waved in the air as the fluttering wings of the angels. Fervently the Holy Ghost is called upon and soon His presence is felt above their heads; the "great transfiguration has been fulfilled" -- everything now becomes Heavenly. The whole room becomes the ark of the righteous the vessel that bears the company through the earthly, profane, external world into the kingdom of bliss. The two peasants at the head of the table become the steerman -- Jesus and the Mother of God who steer the new people into the realm of the new Heavenly Kingdom.

Now the miracle exists anew; the helsman arises, stammers and in frenzied rapture addresses the group in an incoherent language -- evidently the sign and miracle of "speaking in tongues". The "divine people" cluster around him trembling, weeping, and heavily sighing for the new transformation. The dance starts again with stampings, kicks, hops, leaps, and shrieks. Bathing in sweat and foaming at

the mouth and with shirts billowed out by the dervish-like dance, the sectarians step up one by one to the helmsman where they bare their bodies to the waist and receive flagellations to signify the "fecundation and generation of the new man in Adam's body".[4]

As Jesus cast off the garments of mortality to rise again in the spirit so do the Khlysty cast off all their clothing. The dance continues more fervently. Now here and there the "new people" are seized with convulsions and sink to the ground senseless. The twelve candles are extinguished and the people of God passionately and lustfully and irregardless of age or relationship roll on the ground in "sinful encounter".[5]

"Only in this mad intoxication of the senses are earthly consciousness and self-will completely extinguished, for in the 'sinful encounter' the earthly ego has no more influence, but only the will of the invisible spirit." This is the complete essence of the Khlysty ritual expressed by Fulop-Miller.

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[4] Rene Fulop-Miller, Rasputin: The Holy Devil, English translation (New York, 1928) p. 32. Hereafter cited as Fulop-Miller, Rasputin.

[5] For further description of these rites see: Paleologue's

We can readily see that marriage to these sectarians is an intolerable and even an accursed institution. Marriage is a sin against the Holy Ghost therefore one could remain a "man of God" only by shunning wedlock.

This sect, by the way, during the Romonov dynasty, became the state church by the acts of its leader Rasputin. The world immediately connected the Greek Orthodox Church with this group and particularly with the leader. The truth of the matter as we authentically now know is that the Eastern Orthodox Church absolutely refused to sanctify the already described degrading practices. On the other hand, the Khlysty held that "if the Orthodox Church" had any "supernatural role, it is a purely satanic one."[6] Thus we see that both factions disavow the practices of the other.

The other sect is known as the Skoptsy.[7] They profess the same spiritualistic doctrines as the Khlysty. The former, however, try to subdue the cravings of the flesh by exhaustations whereas the latter get rid of sexual

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Memoirs. vol. i and ii. passim. (especially the sections on sects). Conybeare, Russian Dissenters. pp. 339-361. Fulop-Miller, Rasputin. pp. 11-32.

6 Conybeare, Russian Dissenters. p. 354.

7 Isaiah 56: 4-5. "For thus says the Lord: 'The eunuchs who

lust by physical mutilations. This group were impressed by certain sayings of the prophet Isaiah and Jesus.

The rites of the two sects are in general identical with each other. "They meet and adore one another and sing their hymns, and dance until they fall into ecstasy and begin to prophesy. But the Radenie or ritual dance has not among them quite the sacramental value as among the Khlysty. The rite of emasculation, baptism with fire and spirit, is their supreme sacrament. Their Christology is adoptionist like that of the Khlysty. Jesus was an ordinary man who was replenished with grace; and after his resurrection, his grace descended into Peter III who is head and defender of the faith. But Jesus was the first of the White Doves, as they call themselves, for He too emasculated himself. This rite is the sole mode of redemption and means of grace."[8]

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keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that I delight in, and hold fast by my covenant -- to them will I give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, one that shall not be cut off.'"

Matthew 19:12. "For some are incapable of marriage from their birth, and some have been made so by men, and some have made themselves so for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let him accept it who can."

Matthew 18:8. "But if your own hand or your own foot makes you fall, cut it off and throw it away. You might better enter upon life maimed or crippled than keep both hands and

There are two classes of "brothers" and "sisters". Those whose flesh has been purified once and for all, by the complete removal of their sex organs are glorified in bearing the great "imperial seal". These have completely destroyed "all the receptacles of the devil". The "minor seal" is borne by the half-hearted who have consented to only a partial operation. These continue to remain exposed to certain demoniac attacks.[9]

Since I have given an account of the Khlysty dance it seems only fair to make the small distinction between the two sects. With this in view I have followed the clear description of Maurice Paleologue. The French Ambassador says:

> "It is a principle with the Skoptsy to assemble at night, 'in imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ who always waited until nightfall when He wished to pray'. Men and women, 'brothers and sisters' are dressed in white.

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feet but be thrown into the everlasting fire."

Luke 23:29. "Happy are the childless women, and those who never borne or nursed children."

These translations are from Smith and Goodspeed, The Bible: An American Translation, (University of Chicago).

For further description see: Conybeare, Russian Dissenters. pp. 363-370. Paleologue's Memoirs. vol. ii, pp. 128-133.

8 Conybeare, Russian Dissenters. pp. 367-368.

> The ceremony begins with circular and very rapid dances, which are continued until the dancer's strength gives out, so that there may be no insidious resurrection of the beast, however weak and humbled he may be already. Then hymns and psalms are sung . . . . The proceedings end with the participants giving each other the Holy Eucharist with pieces of white bread marked with a cross."[10]

Within the spherical interpretation of this thesis we shall become amazed at the consequences fermented by these two sects-- especially by the one known as the Khlysty.

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[9] Paleologue's Memoirs. vol. ii, pp. 131-132.

[10] Ibid., p. 132.

Chapter Three

If the activities of the man whose identity I am about to reveal were confined to the spheres of lust and mysticism, so far as I am concerned he would remain nothing but a more or less curious psychological -- or physiological -- study. But by the force of circumstances the ignorant peasant became not only a political instrument but a false interpretation of the church which had not only refused him membership but had also denounced all of his orgiastic teachings. Nevertheless, the Eastern Orthodox Church has been unjustifiably crucified on the cross of Rasputanism.

But let us examine the man himself -- the spiritual and physical individual whose philosophy and dealings engulfed the Russian Empire and finally ushered the blood stains of 1917.

> "It is by repentance alone", says Rasputin "that we can win salvation. We must therefore sin in order to have an opportunity for repentance. So when God places temptation in our way it is our duty to yield, so that we may secure the necessary condition precedent to a salutary penitence. Besides, was not the first word of life and truth which Christ uttered to mankind 'Repent'? But how can we repent if we have not sinned?" And he continues: "It is not a horror of sin which usually prevents us from yielding to temptation, for if sin was really a horror to us we should not be tempted to commit it. Does a man ever want

> to eat anything he thoroughly dislikes? No, what really stops us and frightens us is the hurt to our pride which repentance involves. Absolute contrition implies absolute humility. No one likes humbling himself, even before God. That is the whole secret of our resistance to temptation. But the Sovereign Judge is not deceived, not for a moment! And when we are in the Valley of Jehoshaphat he will know how to remind us of all the chances of salvation he has offered us which we have rejected. . ."[1]

This is the idea perpetually recurring in the religious jargon with which Rasputin habitually and confidentially clothes his erotic fancy.

In the far-flung borders of Western Siberia between the provincial governments of Tiumen and Tobolsk and in an obscure village known as Pokrovskoie there arrived, about 1871, to the household of a drunken, horse-theiving dealer, Efim by name, a son -- Grigori Efimoveech Rasputin. Rasputin was really a surname imposed upon him by his comrades in reaching adolescence. The word itself is derived from a peasant-slang monosylable Rasputnik meaning "debauchee", "women-chaser", "libertine", "dissipator". It seems that here lay the prohpecy of the future. Maurice Paleologue claims that enraged fathers, yes, even the secret police many a time had thrashed and even

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[1] Quoted in Paleologue's Memoirs. vol. i, p. 149

publicly whipped Grigori for attacks upon the female quarters of the community.

In time Rasputin plied his father's trade -- conveying passengers between villages. It was during one of these journeys that a student of theology from Verkhoture, Mileti Zaborovski, upon speaking to Grigori suddenly realized that this Carter's son possessed extraordinarily conversant powers in religious matters.

The youthful theologian finally convinced Rasputin of the unpardonable sin in wasting such capacities. These words became indelibly impressed upon Grigori's mind and he soon consented to remain at the monastery instead of returning home.

There was something amazingly peculiar about this Verkhoture monastery. There seemed to be a haunting veil of concealment in the mysterious actions of certain brothers. Soon, however, Rasputin learned the cause for the division into the two classes -- "prisoners" and "jailers". The monastery was in reality a "reform" school of the Orthodox Church. It seemed that those carefully watched were adherents

to heretical creeds especially that of the Khlysty. The Church was in the hopes of reforming these men and to again accept them into her bosom.

Rasputin became drawn by the "prisoner" class and his richly endowed temperament and constitution readily marked him out as ripe for the practices of these sectarians. He soon learned in these orgies to understand the real meaning of the mysterious "rebirth through sin", the essence of the Khlysty, and finally casting all barriers aside he plunged into self-abasement and carnal sin.[2]

And with the descent into the self-indulgent, dissolute, and debauched life there came about a desire of both classes, peasants and court society, to accompany this "strange man of God" into the carnalizing oblivian. Yet, using a colloquial phrase, the man was not much to look at. Fulop-Miller has a vivid description of Rasputin. The author of the Holy Devil says:

> "His big head was covered with unkempt brown hair, carelessly parted in the middle and flowing in long strands over his neck. On his high forehead a dark patch was visible, the scar of a wound. His broad, poch-marked nose stood out from his face, and his thin pale lips were hidden by a limp, untidy mous-

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2 Fulop-Miller, Rasputin. pp. 3-32.
Paleologue's Memoirs. vol. i, pp. 138-151.

tache. His weather-beaten, sunburned skin was wrinkled and seamed in deep folds, his eyes were hidden under his projecting eyebrows, the right eye disfigured by a yellow blotch. The whole face was overgrown by a dishevelled light brown beard."[3]

Just what was the irresistibe inductive magnetism of this man? One author claimed that the fascination "lay altogether in his eyes -- cold, steely-gray with that very rare power of expanding and contracting the pupils at will, regardless of the amount of light present."[4]

His voice, too, paralleled that of his personality, rough and harsh but with the flexible power of taking on a "beautiful, deep and charmingly animated tone." A monastic benevolence rained upon those whom in his priestly character he talked to. The next moment, however, he became nothing but savage, animal desire. His soothing speech and benevolent priestly glance would change. A wave of all-devouring sensual desire flamed within the man. Blazing eyes followed an excited, passionate, violent, and insinuating voice. "His glances and words became lewed, cynical, and full of scarcely concealed suggestiveness, until, unexpectedly, his attitude again

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3 Fulop-Miller, Rasputin. p. 3.

4 _____ "Tsarina and Rasputin" in Current History Magazine New York Times. xiii (1920) pp. 153-157. Also

changed entirely, and he spoke of mystical and religious things with poetic ardour and genuine flaming enthusiasm".

"Between these fingers I hold the Russian Empire!"[5] boastfully, arrogantly, and with a brazeness for its audacity exclaimed Rasputin. I must concur with one author when he says: "Through the main entrance the high officials, with their portfolios in their hands, would hurry to the Tsar's study, while at the same time through the back entrance various saintly idiots of both sexes would crowd into the Imperial apartments."[6]

One of these idiots was Rasputin. But let us look into the circumstances making the power and existence of Grigori possible.

"Rasputin Nemesis of the Tsar" in the same Magazine, vol vi, pp. 288-92. (May 1917)

5 Fulop-Miller, Rasputin. p. 171

6 Sergei Michailovich Trufanov (Father Illiodor), The Mad Monk of Russia. (New York, 1918) passim.

Chapter Four

"A great and unforgettable day, on which the grace of God has manifestly been vouchsafed to us. At a quarter past one Alix (the Empress) gave birth to a son. . . . . I have no words to express my gratitude to God for his consolation in our heavy trials. Dear Alix is well. . . ."[1] So writes Tsar Nicholas August 12, 1904. Joy in the Imperial household knew no bounds. Hope, happiness, and affection now centered around Alexis Nicholaievich as the little Tsarevich was called. He was the joy and pride, the sunshine of Tsarkoe Selo -- the Imperial palace.

The infant soon developed into a charming, lovable boy with fair curly hair. His movements were watched ardently; and his first attempts at speech gave great consolation to the now happy family. Soon, however, the parents were to discover that their "only treasure" was afflicted with a painful and incurable sickness. Haemophilia is the name of this congenital disease. Pathologists have claimed that it is a sign of degeneracy. Paleologue has given a clear analysis of the scourge. He says:

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1 Fulop-Miller, Rasputin. p. 81

"The characteristic symptom is a change in the blood which more or less loses the power to congeal. The result is frequent haemorrhage which it is impossible to stop. The least trauma, such as nose bleeding, a slight blow, a prick, or even a trifling accident like a fit of coughing, or a false step is enough to cause a great effusion of blood. In most cases the haemorrhage is internal; it floods the tissues and invades the joints and the intestines. The ordinary haemostatic treatments are powerless to control it. Injections of physiological serums are sometimes efficacious. Two-thirds of all haemophylic subjects die before the age of eleven. Very few survive their twentieth year. From the point of heredity haemophilia is very curious in one way: the disposition is only transmitted to males and always by mothers who are themselves exempt."[2]

So here was sown the seed that blossomed into the tragedy which confined the Tsaritsa to guiding the destiny of Russia. Of course this was only possible because of the personality of the Tsar. As one author said, "The Tsar lacked in strength of will, energy in character, and conscious of mind." His letters[3] reveal the pathetic condition of the man. The Empress on the other hand, as another author described her, was "fanatic, convinced, ceaselessly persistent, determined to have her own way, domineering and hysterical."[4] She was more

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2 Paleologue's Memoirs. vol. i, p. 148.

At the present time the heir to the Spanish throne, afflicted with haemophilia, is fighting for his life in Cuba. There have been over six blood-transfusions administered. At this writing, he is on the road to recovery. The heir, by the way, is over twenty-one. Paleologue says that few survive the twentieth year; the Spanish prince I believe is one of the few who has.

3 Nicholas Romonov, The Letters of the Tsar to the Tsaritsa,

than a match in every respect for the weak and vacillating Tsar.

Alexandra had given birth to four charming and healthy daughters, her only son, the long desired heir to the throne[5], suffered from this scourge, haemophilia, and she well knew that his disease came through herself. The Tsaritsa had now a special reason for despairing. The agonizing ordeal of her only son was brought to him by her. She well knew that death watched over her boy; following him at every step, ready to carry him to an eternal parting, she must save him at any cost! Since science (and science shamefully admitted that nothing could be done for the infant) gave her no consolation, she concluded that she must under any circumstances appeal to other forces.

In the meantime, Rasputin had been traversing Russia healing, and converting the peasants into the mysteries of the Khlysty. The healing powers were embedded in his deep set gray eyes which bore and searched the physical anatomy of an individual. Everywhere Grigori was looked upon as a saint. Soon his fame spread to Tsarkoe Selo. And as fate would have circumstances, the simple Siberian peasant was brought to the

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[4] H. De Wissen, "Mystery of the Tsarina" in Forum lxii (1919) pp. 169-181.

[5] Pierre Gilliard, Thirteen Years at the Russian Court. (New York, 1921) passim.

palace and with the words "Believe in the power of my prayers; believe in my help and your son will live", ringing in her ears the Tsarina from now on sacrificed the political destiny of Russia and the honor of the Greek Orthodox Church.

Maurice Paleologue, the last French Ambassador to the Russian Court, gives an authentic account of the healing power and the circumstances under which Rasputin was always called back to the Palace. I shall give the account verbatim.

> "In October the imperial family stayed for a time at Spala in Poland, where the Tsar often went to enjoy the hunting in the wonderful forest of Krolova.
>
> One day the young Tsarevich was coming back from a sail on the lake and miscalculating his jump on to the landing stage caught his hip against the deck. At first the contusion seemed superficial and harmless. But a fortnight later, on October 16, a swelling appeared in the groin; the thigh began to inflame, and then his temperature suddenly rose. Doctors Feodorov, Derevenko, and Rauchfuss were hastily summoned and diagnosed a sanguineous tumour which was becoming septic. An operation was necessary, but the haemophylic tendency of the child made an incision out of the question. Yet his temperature rose every hour: on October 21 it reached 39'8. The parents never left the sick boy's bedroom as the doctors did not conceal their extreme anxiety. In Spala Church the priests prayed day and night in relays. By order of the Emperor a solemn service was simultaneously held in Moscow before the miraculous ikon of the Iverskaia Virgin. And from morning to night the people of St. Petersburg thronged Our Lady of Kazan.
>
> On the morning of the 22nd the Empress came for

> the first time to the drawing-room where she was met by Colonial Narishkin, aide-de-camp on duty, Princess Elizabeth Obelensky, her lady-in-waiting, Sazanov, who had come to make his report to the Emperor, the Count Ladislas Wielopolsky, Director of the Imperial hunting establishments in Poland. Alexandra Feodorovna was pale and emaciated, but wore a smile. To the anxious questions which were put to her she replied in a calm voice: 'the doctors notice no improvement yet, but I am not a bit anxious myself now. During the night I have received a telegram from Father Grigori and it has reassured me completely.' When she was pressed for details she simply read out the wire: 'God has seen your tears and heard your prayers. Grieve no more! Your son will live.'
>
> On the next day, the 23rd, the invalid's temperature fell to 38'9. Two days later the tumour in the groin began to dry, The Tsarevich was saved." [6]

Paleoluge tells of other instances and accidents experienced by the heir-apparent. In each case Rasputin would be called upon and by the mere touch of his hands upon the boy or even the slightest glance from Grigori set the patient on the road to recovery. And in consequence and in proportion the Tsar and Tsaritsa, on account of the illness of their little son, fell more and more under the spell of Rasputin. Thus this strange Siberian peasant succeeded in winning the love and trust of the Imperial couple. . . . . he was able to stimulate, encourage, cheer, rouse, comfort, and edify them. From now on the Tsarina when writing the Tsar[7] speaks of "Our Friend" or

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6 Paleologue's Memoirs. vol. i, pp. 147-148.

"He says" and the reference is always capitalized.

As the power of Rasputin increased and more enemies were created and persecution against the peasant became a reality by authorities and the secret police so much did his prestige increase. Had not the spies of the temporal powers from earliest times tried to put God's emissaries in chains, imprison them, and nail them to the cross?

The Tsarina on the other hand claimed Rasputin as her God and Saviour. She became the medium in which favors were had from the Tsar for the ignorant peasant. In her letters she definitely describes herself as his "wall in the rear". She even speaks of "wearing trousers" and recalls Catherine the Great and how she saved Russia, and after all she was merely trying to do the same thing. Soon and graually Rasputin became the ultimate factor in all decisions. Practically no minister could be appointed except on the recommendation by the ignorant representative of the Khlysty. In the last letter to the Tsar the character of the Tsarina comes to view in the light of what she has to say.

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7 Alexandra Romonov, Letters of the Tsaritsa to the Tsar. (New York, 1924). passim.

Tsarkoe Selo, Feb. 27, 1917.

My best Beloved:

Sorrow and hurt was inside of me when I let you go by yourself without any company. . . . What a ghastly time it is we are living through. And our parting makes it all the more ghastly. For now when you are tired and worn out I cannot be near by to take care of you. God has laid a heavy cross on you. I wish deep within me that I could help you carry this burden. You are brave and plucky. With all my words I am suffering with you. . . . . Our Dear Friend (Rasputin) who now finds himself in the other world (Rasputin is killed or has been killed by one of the princes at this date), he, too, prays to God for you. There He is near to us. But how willingly I would consent to hear his comforting and quiet voice now. My dear, all you need is to be firm and show the strength of your hand. . . . To be firm means to be cruel and warmly loving at the same time. . . . . a child that cares for his father must be afraid to be disobedient. . . . I wish we could live in quiet and peace?

I understand only too well how the bellowing mob acts when you are near. They are afraid of you now and they must be more afraid of you. . . They must tremble before you. Among the cabinet ministers, too, you are a power and a leader.

Your wife -- your help mate stands on watch back of the front. It is true she cannot do much. My eyes ache with tears. . . . I shall pray to God my angel. . . . How I love you. Always more and more. My love for you is as deep as the sea. My affection for you is immeasurable.

Sleep quiet. . . . our Friend has committed us to his guardianship. . . . rest your tired head against my breast. It will be bitter for me with the nights alone. . . . light of my life, my treasure given to me from Almighty God, know my arms are around you and my lips touch yours. . . . .

Sunny[8]

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8 Alexandra Romonov, "Last Love Letter of Tsarina to Nicholas" in The Literary Digest lx (March 8, 1919) pp. 74-76.

Chapter Five

"I had only to threaten that I would go back to Siberia and abandon them and their child to disaster, and they immediately gave in to me in everything" boastfully exclaimed Rasputin. This boast carried to an ultimate conclusion was not very far from the objective in mind -- that of coming into control of the government.

And Grigori came into control. At his apartment an anti-room was constructed wherein the petitioners could sit and wait in little benches and upholstered chairs for their turn to see the "little father". Some waited hours for an audience, others became impatient and left. The stream of visitors and office seekers usually started forming in the early morning and lasted until late in the evening. The presence of Rasputin, however, was not expected until ten. His daughter writes that on some days the visitors became so numerous the waiting line extended out into the street. Automobiles just coming into vogue were prevalent in the parking section of Grigori's street.

There were three classes that paid Rasputin a visit, the poor who had no money to offer as a bribe, the well-to-do

who could and did and the third group who extended something altogether different. Basically they all wanted some sort of a favor from the "little father". The first group not only met Rasputin empty handed for services rendered but asked for alms in return: seldom were they refused. A son who wanted to visit his dying father in the village province but had not the necessary sum; a father who was too poor to send his children to school; a sick person who needed medical care but who had not the sufficient means -- all these found haven in Grigori's financial hospitality. This was one of the reasons why Rasputin became popular with the peasants. Not only that but didn't he present their grievance to the Tsar, and was not he opposed to the life-devastating properties of war?

> "There are too many dead and wounded", Grigori tells the French Ambassador in an interview, "too many widows and orphans, nothing but ruin and tears! Think of all the poor fellows that will never come back, and remember that each of them has left behind him five, six..... ten persons who can only weep! I know of villages where everybody's in mourning. . . . and what about those who do come back! What are they like! Legless, armless, blind! . . . . It's terrible! For more than twenty years we shall harvest nothing but sorrow on Russian soil!"[1]

The second class, rich widows, financiers, rich peasants,

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1 Paleologue's Memoirs. vol. i, p. 292.

persons seeking ministerial posts or other government offices, after submitting their petitions placed their "gifts" on the table and Rasputin without "scruple or embarrassment" politely gathered and stuffed it into his pockets only to take some of it out again and help somebody in need. The "gift" was in most cases money. Of course in this manner he raised to office a large number of corrupt and incompetent men but this was not taken into consideration. The third class of suppliants were women and girls who came to beg for protection and probably ensure the welfare, the career, or the business interests of some one closely connected with them. These offered not gold, or silver or any other kinds of money but their charming smiles, enticing glances which promised and meant so much, and finally their moist lips. As one author said: "Every one of these women had heard that no gift, however costly, could dispose Grigori to help so readily as feminine charm. If he liked the smile or the passionate and seductive pose of a suppliant who offered herself as a gift, he always accepted this gift with joy and happiness, and spared no pains to carry out the wishes of his petitioners. In such cases he set in movement the highest authorities, ministers, and even the Tsar and the Tsaritsa."[2]

One can emphatically say that from the birth of the Tsarevich down to the revolution of 1917 the advice of the "Friend"

is being asked for in every important appointment. No one expected or hoped for a ministerial post unless he had previously submitted to an examination by Rasputin and passed creditably. An office seeker who had incurred Grigori's displeasure seldom became appointed to a position.

The sphere of Rasputanism reached such a degree of decadence that certain persons nearest the Tsar suggested that the Duma and the council of the Empire march to the palace and implore the sovereigns to dismiss Grigori. A priest member of the Duma denounced the "saint" in the name of the Church. Several other personages of high rank, including the Tsar's brother (later he lost the military command for this action by the request of Rasputin) implored and attempted to exert pressure on both the Imperial couple for the purpose of removing the pernicious influence of the mystic. All, however, was in vain.[3]

The Duma in 1912 addressed an interpellation to Minister of Justice Scheglovitov and Minister of the Interior Makarov concerning Rasputin's activities. In this connection the "little father" wrote to the Imperial couple:

> Dear Papa and Mamma:
>
> The devil is again at work, and the Duma serves him. There is plenty of revolutionists and dirty Jews in the Duma, and their desire is to overthrow the God-annointed sovereign. Guchkov is a dog; all he wants to

> sow is discontent with his interpellations. Papa, the Duma is yours and you can do with it anything you please. The idea! Interpellations about Grigori! Allow no interpellations.
>
> Grigori.[4]

His advice was followed. The Tsar did as he pleased with the Duma. Disintergration followed and within a few years blood splattered throughout the Imperial domain.

In a previous Chapter I have pointed out that the Holy Synod was really a bastard institution as created by Peter the Great. In Grigori's era this institution lost all respect. In 1911 the See of Tobolsk became vacant, Rasputin by persuading the Tsar succeeded in appointing and placing a common gardner's boy who worked in a monastery to the chair of the Bishopry. It seems that the "little fatner" had been friendly with the new appointee in earlier days, and he now took the advantage of friendship. This was also an opportunity to infuriate the learned and arrogant prelates by elevating the gardner's boy to a Bishopric. Grigori had never any use for the scholastic theology and

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2 Fulop-Miller, Rasputin. pp. 201-240

3 A. Yarmolinsky, "Rasputin: A Study in Degeneration" in Bookman xlv (June 1917) pp. 385-392.

4 Ibid

its representatives, and this gave him enormous pleasure to be able to humilate the Synod and all the princess of the Church by this Coup. After all did the Church ordain him a monk or a priest or any other office? No, why then should he now bow to the will of the Church when "God put" him in power?

In his memoirs of September 28, 1914 Maurice Paleologue gives an account of all those who come under the influence of the "holy man".

> "Of these", says the French Ambassador, "the most eminent is the Minister of Justice Stcheglovitov,[5] who is also leader of the Extreme Right in the Council of the Empire. He is a man of intellect, fluent and acid of speech, and he brings a good deal of calculation and elasticity to the realization of his designs. But he is only a recent acquisition to Rasputinism. Almost as important is the Minister of the Interior, Nicholas Maklakov,[6] whose amiable docility is highly agreeable to the sovereigns. Then comes the Procurator of the Holy Synod, Sabler, a contemptible and servile character; through him the Staretz (Rasputin) as it were controls the whole episcopate and all the high ecclesiastical offices. Next in order I should place the First Procurator of the Senate,

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5 In a previous paragraph this same man addressed an interpellation against Rasputin, but now, two years later he has discovered the influence and the power of Rasputin and in consequence (to continue in office) he has taken up the banner of the "little father". Paleologue somewhat sarcastly says: "he is a recent acquisition to Rasputinism."

6 This is the same man as the Makarov in a previous paragraph.

> Dobrovolsky, then Sturmer, Member of the Council of the Empire, then the Governor of the Imperial palaces, General Voyeikov who is a son-in-law of the Minister of the Court. At the end I place Bieletzky, Director of the Police Bureau, a very bold and cunning individual. It is easy to imagine the enormous powers represented by a coalition of such influences in an autocratic and centralized state like Russia.[7]

Thus Rasputinism reigned supreme and unrestrained in the land of the Tsars. The reason for the man's rise we have already reviewed.

By peculiarity of the Russian language the sound of a word or a name is retained although the spelling might be different.

7 Paleologue's Memoirs. vol. i, p. 150.

Conclusion

The triumphant decadence -- the wolf clothed in sheep's clothing -- turned out to be none other than the crafty Rasputin draped in the garments of the helpless Eastern Orthodox Church, an institution who had neither ordained him either a monk or priest nor wanted him under her wing. Yet, immediately and after the 1917 revolution the Church was made the scapegoat by two factions for the bloody results of the Emprie. The first group consisted of the revolutionists who prided themselves in hiding the actual facts of Rasputanism so that they might anihilate the Church from Russia. This action coincided with their principles. The second group represented the rest of the world who believed the misrepresented propaganda and in consequence condemned the Eastern Church.

On the one hand, in their destructive fury, the Bolshevists destroyed the icons and other church relics as a progressive move, but on the other, in the place of these, the icon of Lenin and his body at Red Square served and remain the opium-symbols of hypocrisy, lying, cheating, plundering and murdering.

But the world now knows that the Tsarevich's illness

coupled with Rasputin's hypnotic and healing powers were the two main causes that brought Grigori to a powerful front. The world has also discovered since those dark days that that power was successfully used under two weaklings -- Tsar and the Tsaritsa -- until the inevitable end which arrived upon the wings of death and oblivion.

It has been said that Rasputin "owed his unshakable position. . . . to the frequent threat uttered in prophetic tones: 'so long as I live, the Imperial family will also live; when I die, they will also perish.' The Tsaritsa and even the Tsar. . . . believed in the prophecy and this alone was enough to make them reject any idea of a separation from their 'Friend'."[1] It was this tone that sacrificed the political and religious honor of Russia upon the sacrificial block of Rasputanism.

My purpose will be to review the classes that this man brought under his power. First, he appealed to the mystical peasant-classes because they found consolation and pleasure in the collective frenzy in which religious ecstasy became mingled with sexual fury, within the reams of the Khlysty -- Rasputin's "Church". As one author has said: "The Orthodox priest. . .

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1 Fulop-Miller, Rasputin. p. 341.

had promised them the fulfillment of their yearning for purity and spiritual peace, on condition that they led a stainless, pure, and virtuous life here below; but this demand was in terrible antagonism with the desires of their sinful bodies and ardent lips. The way to God required renunciation of sensual joys; the way of sensual joy. . . . led away from God. Then father Grigori appeared. . . . preached his new doctrine that sin was not the way to damnation, but rather the quickest and sure way to salvation; and the discord between soul and body, between religious and sensual release, was thus resolved."[2]

Second, he appealed to the leaders and the heads of the Court because of his healing powers and the saving of the heir to the throne from death.

I now have come to an end and as a touch of exoneration for the State Church of Russia let us bear this in mind: "The assassination in Petrograd of the man widely known as Grigori Rasputin (December 16, 1916) has removed from the field of social and political life in Russia one of the most extraordinary as well as one of the most successful impostors who ever made religion a cloak for ambition, sensuality and vice."[3]

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2 Ibid., p. 207

3 G. Kennan, "Russian Religious Imposter" in Outlook cxv (Jan. 17, 1917) pp. 102-103.

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